

# Parishes in Center Ridge and Stuttgart are the latest tornado targets

written by Malea Hargett |



When caught in a tornado, Father John Yates, CSSp, believes the best place to be is in church. On May 2, an EF3 tornado came through Center Ridge and made a path through the Catholic Point community where St. Joseph Church is located. Father Yates was celebrating Mass at 8 a.m.

"It was First Friday and during Communion time," he said. "The front doors blew open. We got kind of scared. And I said, 'Go in peace.' ... Thank God we were in church at the right time. The Lord took care of us."

When Father Yates and the parishioners left church, they surveyed the damage, including six uprooted cedar trees and minor damage to the steeple, youth building, property fence, parish hall and rectory roof.

The parish is located on 10 acres and includes at least eight buildings and several other storage buildings.

Theresa Paladino, church secretary and business manager, said the parish's June 21 picnic, which draws participants from around the area, will be affected. The pavilion where the cake stand, bingo and country store are located has to be rebuilt.

"The roof lifted up and shifted and set back down on the posts," she said.

The most damage occurred in the cemetery where a large stone crucifix was knocked down as well as several headstones. Volunteers from the parish and others came to clean up the church grounds.

"Everything worked out. We are so pleased. ... Everything is so wonderfully cleaned up," Father Yates said.

On May 2, 11 tornadoes hit northern, central and eastern Arkansas, killing seven people. Eight days later, tornadoes continued to plague the state as they have for the past three months.

This time, the 21-mile long tornado in Lonoke and Arkansas counties didn't kill anyone, but damaged 200 homes and 50 businesses.

Holy Rosary Church and School in Stuttgart was one of the first properties hit May 10. Two

stained-glass windows were broken and the roof was damaged on the church. A tree fell through the fourth-grade classroom, likely leaving the school unusable through the end of the school year.

Because the parish hall was not damaged, when power is restored the students will probably meet there, said Kathy Lorince, school principal.

The pre-kindergarten building, which was the former convent, also sustained roof damage.

Lorince said May 12 that most of the city has been without electricity since the storm and won't likely get it back for two more days.

At the 10:30 a.m. Mass Sunday, May 11, two lamps powered by a generator were placed on the altar.

"There were 20 people at Mass in various states of dress," she said.

Lorince said the biggest change on the school property is the loss of oak and pine trees. "We have lots and lots of pine trees, but now we don't," she said. The campus included at least 30 pine trees and four oak trees, but now only five pine trees and three oak trees are standing.

"Old oak trees, big old trees," Lorince said. "We will be very hot this summer."

Parishioners from Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Slovak arrived May 12 to clear much of the debris away, she said. "This morning you couldn't even see the grounds, but now we can," Lorince said.